

(I'd Never Lost It All) Till I Lost You by cali-chan (girls_are_weird)

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Summary:

To his thirteen-year-old mind, six months was not *soon*. No, six months was officially *a long time*. And every day from today on would be *a long time* since the last time he saw her. And that... that made it hurt so much more. PG, angst/pining, Mike/Eleven, between S1 & S2.

(I'd Never Lost It All) Till I Lost You

Author's Note:

I'm so sorry about this.

Okay, actual hopefully helpful note: This one's really sad, guys. Like, *really freaking sad*. No specific triggers, just sadness in general. If you're suffering from certain mental health conditions or are going through some rough issues in your life and you feel like reading something *really freaking sad* might affect your emotional stability, please please *please* take that into account before reading this. Take care of yourselves, please. <3

*I met you by the pool, so free and careless.
That evening didn't go as we had planned,
but I knew I had to bring you out to see me;
I was a selfish boy in love with half a heart in his hand.*

*We would dance all night not caring who was watching,
live life like there was nothing we could lose.
But I was wrong and there is nothing in this world I wouldn't do
to relive every moment spent with you.*

~Secondhand Serenade, "Lost."

It all started with his Geometry homework.

Actually, no; it started earlier that morning when he looked at his calendar and realized what the date was. That's when he knew that day was going to be bad. But it didn't start killing him on the inside until he and Will began working on Geometry.

"So you take sides of each triangle— the ones that are the same, I mean— and you set up the rule of three, then cross-multiply that and you get... Hmm. Wait, that can't be right. What did you get for this one?"

He would've answered, but he could barely hear the words. Will's voice was muffled, almost like Mike himself was underwater, and he couldn't tear his eyes away from the two digits he'd just written down on his notebook, framed in a rectangle as he usually did with the answers to math problems to make them stand out from the rest of the work.

"Mike, did you finish this problem already?" Will leaned in to take a look at his notebook and, when Mike's gaze didn't even falter from the number 11 scribbled at the end of the page, that's when it must've hit Will that something was wrong. "Mike? Are you okay?"

"I can't do this today," Mike muttered under his breath, his stomach clenching from how suddenly *empty* he felt.

"But you said we should work on this so we had time for our campaign tomorrow..." Mike didn't even look at his friend as he slammed his notebook closed and pushed himself off his chair, only taking a second to look around before lunging for his backpack and starting to throw stuff into it. "Mike, what are you doing? What's going on?"

He threw his Supercomm in last and zipped the bag closed before shouldering it on his way to the basement door. He heard Will's chair scrape against the floor as he stood up. "Wait, you're leaving? Mike —"

"Go home, Will," was all he said, only looking over his shoulder for a second before opening the door and walking outside, heading straight for his bike.

"What? Where are you going?" was the last he heard before the door closed behind him.

He didn't know where he was going; not initially, at least. All he

knew was that he needed to get out of the house because everything in it, *even his freaking Geometry homework*, was reminding him of that week. Of *her*. And it was eating away at his heart.

It wasn't the first time he'd felt that way. He hadn't felt like himself since that day in November, and some days were better than others. Some days were pretty bad. His birthday had been particularly rough, because his mother had planned a dinner with all his friends, but there was one friend missing. Christmas as well. He'd never really liked Valentine's Day, but that year, every time he came across a pink streamer or a heart-shaped crepe-paper decoration, it felt like he was being poked in the chest with something pointy and sharp.

The day of the Snow Ball he locked himself in his room and did not come out until the next morning. He didn't answer his mother's questions. He ignored his friends' calls. He didn't even come out to eat.

He knew his family was worried, though his parents were more on the angry side nowadays after all the trouble he'd gotten himself in since November. ("This isn't the first time you pull something like this. It's more like strike fifteen, Michael, and something's gotta give.") And he was *trying* to be okay, he really was— to go to school and hang out with his friends and be a kid, like he'd always been— but it was hard to ignore the tectonic shift that occurred in his life that week in the fall.

His friends sometimes seemed to be walking on eggshells around him — well, him and Will— but in that case Mike was more than okay with just letting them skirt around the issue, because he was sure his friends all thought she was dead. And Mike didn't need their condolences or commiseration, because she wasn't dead. *She wasn't dead.*

That's why he'd started calling out to her every night, at first. Because she had to be somewhere out there— he didn't have superpowers so he could find her like she found Will, so the most he could do was call out and hope to get a response, maybe, but *she* had powers and he felt... if she could hear him, if she could hear how much he missed her, she would come back. She was the most amazing person he'd

ever known, so if anyone could come back from an encounter with a demogorgon, it was her. Right? She would never stay away on purpose. She would come back. To Hawkins. To him.

She'd come back soon. He was sure of it. He just had to keep trying.

And then, every once in a while as the days went by— thirty, sixty, a hundred— he started noticing it. Initially it was nothing more than a weird chill, some strange static in the air that his brain attributed to the weather or the radio signals or some other natural phenomenon, but every time he felt it, it was like she was right there, near him, almost like she was a ghost blending just out of sight. Like if he tried hard enough he might see her, or even hear her. And he knew it wasn't real, it couldn't be— it had to be some kind of mirage his desperation had cooked up— and he was pretty sure he was going crazy, but it kept him going, because even if it was just an illusion, it made him feel like she was close. Like she was that close to coming back.

Soon.

And that's what made today so much worse, worse than any of those supposedly special days and holidays he'd slogged through in the past few months. Because today was May 12th, 1984. It was, according to his calendar, day 182. Today marked exactly six months since Eleven had disappeared.

And to his thirteen-year-old mind, six months was not *soon*. No, six months was officially *a long time*. And every day from today on would be *a long time* since the last time he saw her. And that... that made it hurt so much more.

That's why, when he left his house that morning, he wasn't thinking about when she would come back. He wasn't thinking about why she hadn't come back yet. No, today he just wanted to *feel* her. He didn't care if he was fooling himself, he didn't care if seeing things that weren't really there meant he was crazy. If that was the only way he could feel her near him, then he *wanted* to be crazy. At least just for today.

He biked around town aimlessly for a long while, but eventually he found himself headed almost automatically toward Mirkwood. He couldn't remember the exact spot where they'd found her that night—it had been dark and rainy, and every tree in these goddamned woods looked exactly the same— but he wanted to make sure he remembered every other single detail about that night, so eventually he simply picked a tree that seemed to be more-or-less in that general area, sat down right by it, pulled out his Supercomm, and just... talked.

He spoke about him and Lucas and Dustin sneaking out to look for Will, and getting caught in the rain just as they ventured into the forest. He spoke about the argument they were having as they looked around, because Dustin kept getting freaked out by stuff out of the corner of his eye and Lucas kept barking at him to quit it, and Mike had to keep telling them both to shut up because he couldn't hear anything. He spoke about the way the three of them jumped when they realized there was someone near them that wasn't just a product of Dustin's imagination. He spoke about seeing her for the first time, thinking she was a boy for half a second, then realizing she wasn't as the beam of his flashlight reflected on the bright yellow of the t-shirt she'd been wearing and the paleness of her terrified face.

He remembered walking up to her, confused and worried that she might run from him like a frightened animal. He remembered asking her who she was and what she was doing there and receiving no answer, then offering her his jacket for cover and his hand to hold, leading her toward his bike with a gentle *Let's get you out of the rain* as the first promise he ever made her. He remembered his friends' confusion as he told them they were taking her back to his house, but he also remembered when she finally sat behind him on the seat of his bike and hesitantly held onto his sides, and how he was flooded with a certainty that he was doing the right thing.

He remembered, and he was never going to forget. *Never.*

He followed the train tracks toward the junkyard, where he headed straight for the bus. He went to the last row of seats and sat down with his back against the back door and his legs stretched out in front of him. He closed his eyes and thought back to every conversation

they'd had, from him bragging about the size of his TV set to her asking him what pudding was. There were so many things she didn't know, so many things he wanted to show her— but he didn't get enough time. And there were so many things he wanted to learn from her, *about* her, but all he could do at the moment was ask, so... that's what he did. He sat there for over two hours and just wondered out loud.

He didn't go to the school. He did alright when it was full of people and he had his friends there to make things seem more normal, but he wasn't sure he could face the deserted hallways and empty classrooms when there was no one else around. Not without wanting to throw up, at least. So instead he went in the opposite direction, passing by Bradley's Big Buy on the way to his final destination. They'd changed the front doors— now they swung open instead of sliding. Not that it made much of a difference.

It was almost sundown by the time he made it to the quarry. Not to water level, because that brought back bad memories and he didn't want to remember any moment when he pushed her away voluntarily. He couldn't even *fathom* doing such a thing now, and he only wanted to remember the good moments. But when he got to higher ground, to the edge of the cliff he'd jumped off of to protect Dustin, the cliff where she'd saved his life, he felt like the weight around his heart had turned into a chokehold that wasn't letting him breathe properly.

So he sat down near the edge of the cliff and silently cried.

He cried over everything he'd been through. He cried over everything *she'd* been through. He cried because he missed her, and he missed who he used to be. He cried because the world wasn't fair, and because friendship couldn't solve every problem, and because good people sometimes went away. He cried until he felt he would run out of tears, and then he cried some more, because he'd been trying to hold it in for so long— *six months is a long time*— and he simply couldn't do it anymore.

He cried because he couldn't feel her. He'd been all around Hawkins, spent the entire day thinking of her, remembering her, feeling his

heart ache with how much he missed her, but he couldn't feel her. He needed to feel her presence, to hear her voice calling out his name today more than ever, but there was... nothing. Nothing but pain. Nothing but loneliness. Maybe he *had* just imagined feeling her, after all.

Dinnertime had already come and gone when he reached Maple Street. He shouldn't have come in through the front door— he knew his parents would be up in arms because Will was shit at lying— but he was too upset to care. When he walked into the house all he wanted was to go straight to the basement where no one would bother him and cry himself to sleep, but his mother wasn't having it.

She was talking on the phone when the door slammed closed behind him. "—if it's something like last year— wait, he just walked in. Thank you, Jim, I'm so sorry for bothering you." She pushed the phone angrily against the wall-mounted base and stood up, making her way toward him in wide sprints. "*Michael Theodore Wheeler*," she declared, using his full name as she usually only did when she was really, really pissed. "Where have you been? Will said you just left with no explanation and I've been worried sick, I almost called the police—"

She stopped dead in her tracks when he turned around so that she could take a look at his face. "Michael? Sweetie, what's wrong?" she asked, her anger immediately giving way to concern when she saw her child was crying.

At any other moment, Mike might've given in to that concern, let his mother fuss over him and take care of him when he was feeling bad. But today, *today*, he didn't want to be comforted. If he couldn't feel Eleven, he didn't want to feel anything. He took a step back, dodging out of his mother's grasp. "Can we not do this today? I just want to be alone," he asked her, his words broken up by sobs as tears still streamed down his face. He couldn't stop them anymore.

His mother would not be deterred. "Michael, you've been out the whole day and you're obviously hurting. If something happened to you, anything, I need to know about it—" Mike closed his eyes and shook his head desperately.

"Mom, just *leave me alone!*" he finally exploded, not caring that he was screaming, not caring that he would be in trouble for all of this tomorrow, not caring about anything. "I just need to be alone..." With one last heaving sob he spun on his heels and ran for the basement door, leaving his mother behind him, frantically calling out for him to wait.

He ran down the stairs, throwing his backpack off without caring where it landed and crawling into the blanket fort— *her* blanket fort — where he laid down and cried even harder than he had all day, harder than he had since that night in November.

He hugged his Supercomm to his chest, not even realizing he wasn't pressing the PTT button, as his regrets and fears started to pour out unbidden. "El," he sobbed so hard that his breath caught and his molars clanged together. "El, *please*." He wasn't even sure what he was begging for. "I'm sorry. I'm *so sorry*."

He turned to his side and pressed his face against the blankets under him, breaths coming out in gasps, both because his nose was blocked from crying so much, and because his lungs felt like he couldn't get enough air in. "I'm sorry I couldn't help you, I'm sorry I couldn't keep my promise, I'm—" His voice broke in a cough, and he pulled his legs to his chest, curling up on himself.

"I'm sorry. I miss you so much. Please, *please* don't leave me again..." He wasn't even really sure of what he was saying. She was gone, he'd seen her disappear, she couldn't leave *again*, but he wasn't thinking straight. His head hurt, he couldn't breathe properly, and he was tired... so, so tired. "You've been gone six months and I... I just want you to come back. I *need* you to come back. El, please..."

His sobs had started to cede way to his necessity for oxygen and his mind was clouding up, lids moving jerkily up and down as he fought the pull of sleep. "Please come back..." he whispered, closing his eyes against the tingling feeling on the side of his face, like someone was caressing him with a feather. "...Eleven?" He stretched a hand out in front of him, reaching out into the empty space beside him.

"I can feel you..." He opened his eyes just a sliver, because that was as much as he could manage. Then he smiled— just barely, weakly, but he smiled. "You're here..." His breaths started to even out as he succumbed to slumber. "I miss you... El..." His eyes fluttered closed, his hand dropped onto the quilt under him, and that was that.

The next morning, he would remember very little of those last minutes, and what little he remembered he would attribute to confusion when straddling the line between sleep and wakefulness, or simply his mind giving him what he so wanted after such a trying day. But that would be tomorrow.

Tonight, he slept.

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On the other side of town, in a cabin hidden in the forest, an outdated TV set blared static out into the small living space, occupied only by a young girl kneeling in front of it, with a bleeding nose, her eyes covered by a dark fabric blindfold.

Inside the void, Eleven carefully crawled into the blanket fort and laid down beside him, less than a foot away. And she cried. She cried because he was crying, and it broke her heart to see him in pain. But she also cried because *she* was hurting. Because she wanted to be near him, *really* near him, not only within this desolate, colorless mockery created by her mind.

"El. El, *please*," he sobbed relentlessly. "I'm sorry. I'm *so sorry*."

"No," she wept, her breath catching in her throat. "Mike. *My* fault..." she offered, sniffing. As she said this, he turned to his side, so that he was facing her directly, and for a moment she thought he might've heard her, that he could see her. But when he continued speaking, she realized he hadn't.

He took a few gasping breaths before he could get the words out. "I'm

sorry I couldn't help you, I'm sorry I couldn't keep my promise, I'm—" He coughed, cutting off his words abruptly, and he curled up in the fetal position. "I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry, too," she responded, the words punctuated by hiccups as she cried. She scooted over a little closer— not so much that they were touching, because she didn't want to risk getting too close and having him disappear in a puff of smoke.

"I miss you so much," he continued, his voice filled with desperation. "Please, *please* don't leave me again..." He looked so tired, like he could barely focus, like he was barely awake.

"I didn't mean to," she replied with a hurried shake of her head. "I didn't mean to leave. I'm here." She extended a hand, almost intending to touch him, but then pulled back, afraid. It took a lot of concentration to be able to touch someone in the void, and she was already so upset.

"You've been gone six months and I... I just want you to come back," he added, his words starting to slur from the emotion and the exhaustion. The six-month label caught her by surprise, because she'd been counting the days along with him but it hadn't occurred to her that 182 days meant six months. Six months was a long time. To El, it felt like it had been forever. "I *need* you to come back. El, please..."

"Mike, I'm *right here*," she called out to him, wishing he could hear her since she was so close, but feeling like they were miles apart. Her already frail state crumbling even further, she gave in to the urge to touch him, pulling his hair back just slightly so she could just barely run the tips of her fingers over the side of his face, from his temple to the corner of his jaw.

He closed his eyes and she pulled back abruptly, her heart hammering inside her chest. "Please come back..." he whispered, his eyebrows drawing together just slightly. "...Eleven?" he asked. She held her breath. Had he heard her?

He lifted his right hand and stretched it out in front of him, like he was reaching out for her. He didn't make it all the way, his hand suspended a few inches away from her face like he was afraid to

touch her, too. Could he *see* her?

As if answering her question, he spoke again. "I can feel you..." He opened his eyes again and it was almost like he was staring straight right at her, and her heart nearly stopped, because he was smiling—she *never* got to see him smile when she looked for him in the void. Oh, how she'd longed to see his smile. "You're here..."

"I'm here," she gasped again, lifting her hand so that she could touch his, wishing she could pull it toward her face and cradle it against her cheek.

She didn't get to, however, because his eyes started drooping closed and his hand fell down onto the quilts as sleep started to claim him. "I miss you... El..." was the last thing he said, barely audible, more like an exhalation than an actual conscious thought.

She cried harder, knowing that the moment was over. "I miss you, too," she affirmed, aware that he was asleep and couldn't hear her anymore— if he actually had at some point— but unable to hold herself back, she pushed herself to hands and knees and leaned forward, wanting to press her lips against his, even if just for a second.

Unfortunately, just as she was about to, Mike's form disappeared into a cloud of mist, and that was that.

When she came out of the trance, she was still crying. She pulled off her blindfold and took a few deep breaths, trying to calm her tears, but she couldn't manage it— especially when she noticed that at some point while she was in the void, Hopper had come home, probably using his key to the back door.

He was sitting on his bed, which was pushed against the wall on one side of the living room, and he was looking at her with a sad expression, almost like he knew what had just happened. "Come here, kid." He signaled with one hand for her to come to him, and needing the comfort, she hurriedly pushed herself to her feet and ran into his arms, burying her teary face against the front of his uniform. He held her tight, not even caring that her blood was probably going to stain his clothes.

"Mike?" he asked in an understanding tone, and she nodded her head against his torso.

"Six months," she returned between sobs.

He let out a kind of hum in reply, which she assumed meant that he understood what that was about. He rested his scruffy cheek against the top of her head as he rubbed her back, trying to get her to calm down. "It won't be much longer, you know?" he offered gently. "You'll see him again soon. For real, not just in your head."

"Soon?" she asked in a small voice, clinging to the word even though she didn't know the exact meaning. *A short period of time*, Hopper had explained once. And it definitely *had* to be short, she figured now, because six months had already felt like an eternity.

"Mm-hmm," he said, and she wished he'd made it a promise, instead, but she wanted to believe him. So she did.

The next day, she would check in on Mike again, hear him talk about his latest D&D campaign with the boys and anything else that happened on day 183, and her repeated attempts to get him to *feel* her again would be unsuccessful. But that would be tomorrow.

Tonight, she hoped.

Author's Note:

I'm convinced Eleven wasn't the only one struggling with *soon*, y'all. D' = I'm also kind of creeped out that so many of us decided to post sad separation stories this week. Is it something in the water? LOL.

Also, since I'm counting days here, I hope I may be allowed a **quick PSA to my fellow Mike/Eleven shippers**: They didn't spend 353 days apart, guys. Mike *called* Eleven for 353 days, but the final count of days they were apart was slightly higher. Day 353 was Halloween, which was a Wednesday, and they didn't actually reunite until late Sunday (or maybe early Monday?), so it was more like 357 days, give

or take a few hours depending on whether Eleven's return happened before or after midnight.

(God, I hope that ^ doesn't make me sound like a snob— it's just that I've made that mistake before and I'm anal-retentive about stuff like that in my writing, so I figured it might help other people to know. Plus I just finished rewatching the show for like the fifth time and *this time I counted*. #Nerd)

The title of this story is from the song "Lost" by Secondhand Serenade. Also, sorry for all the angst. I promise the next one I write is going to be *happy*.